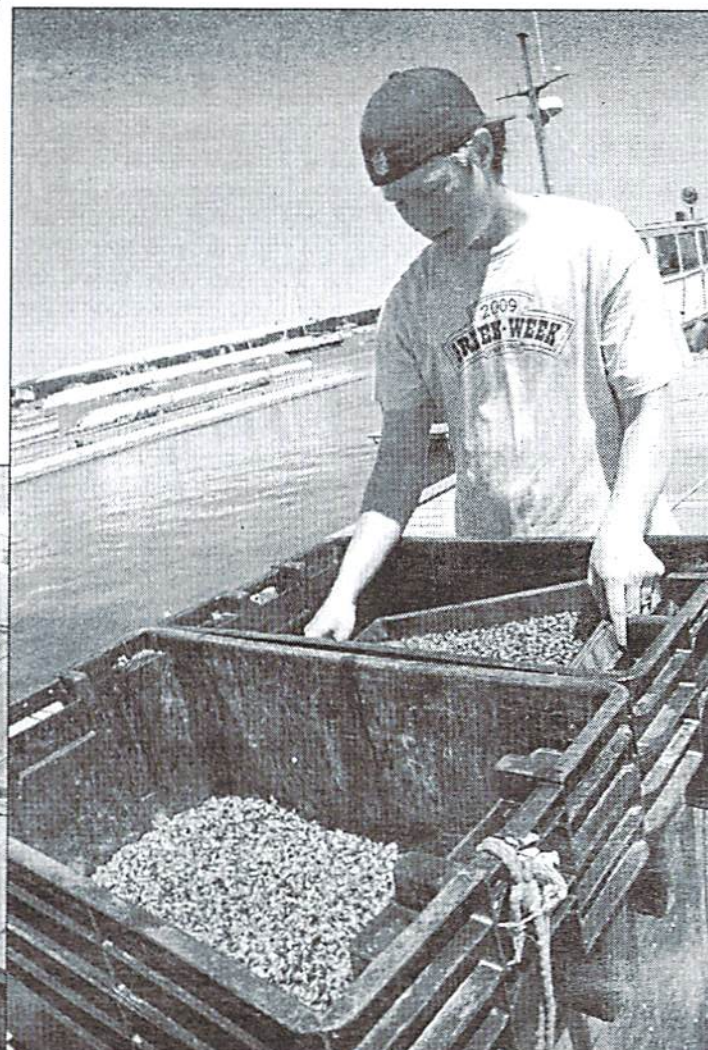


An oyster's life

A photo journey behind the scenes with the workers at Duxbury's Island Creek Oysters

Over the last couple of years, the oyster farming business has been booming in Duxbury. Clipper photographer Karen Wong went behind the scenes with the folks from Island Creek to see just how an oyster goes from a tiny seed to the delicious bivalve on your plate.



The oysters grow incredibly fast, produce a lot of waste, and have to be sorted by size. Ryan Ederle (above) works for one of Island Creek's many growers. After about 4-6 weeks, the seed has grown to the size of a quarter (below) and can be moved to the nursery.

Oyster seed, which Island Creek Oysters secures from two New England hatcheries, arrives in Duxbury in the spring when it's the size of a grain of sand. It's placed into a floating upwelling system (above, right) set under the docks of the Duxbury Bay Maritime School, giving it maximum exposure to the nutrient-rich Duxbury Bay water. Island Creek staffers like Michelle Wong (above) are tasked with keeping the seed clean on a regular basis.

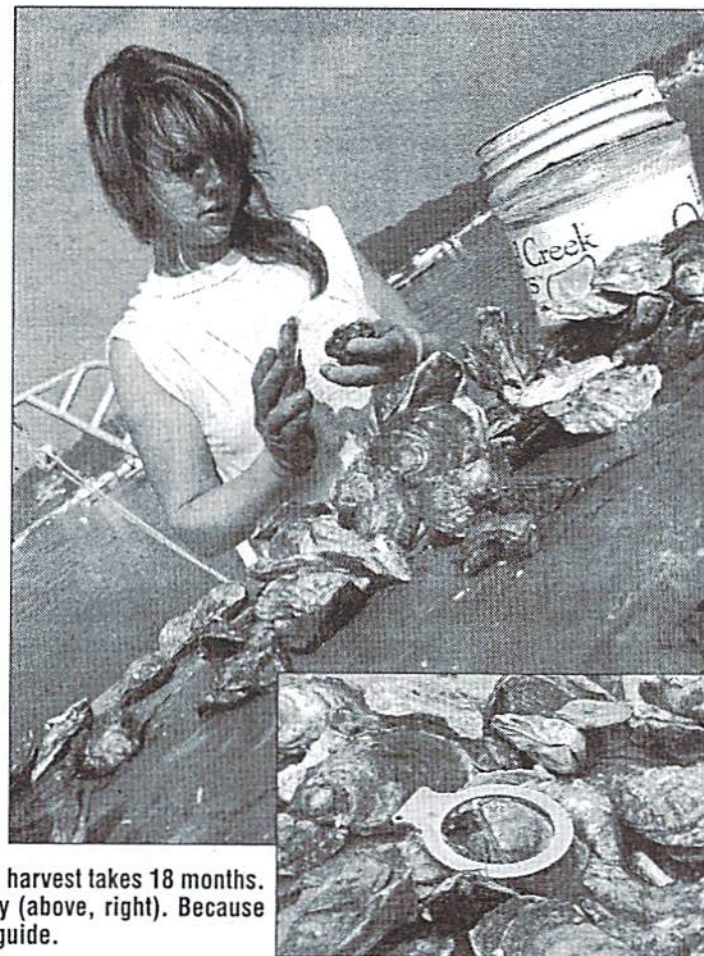


The oysters are loaded onto trucks by wholesale employees like Cory Wyman and Tom Reale to be hand-delivered to local restaurants or packed into boxes to be shipped overnight around the country. The oysters land on tables from Boston to Hong Kong within 24 hours of coming out of the water.

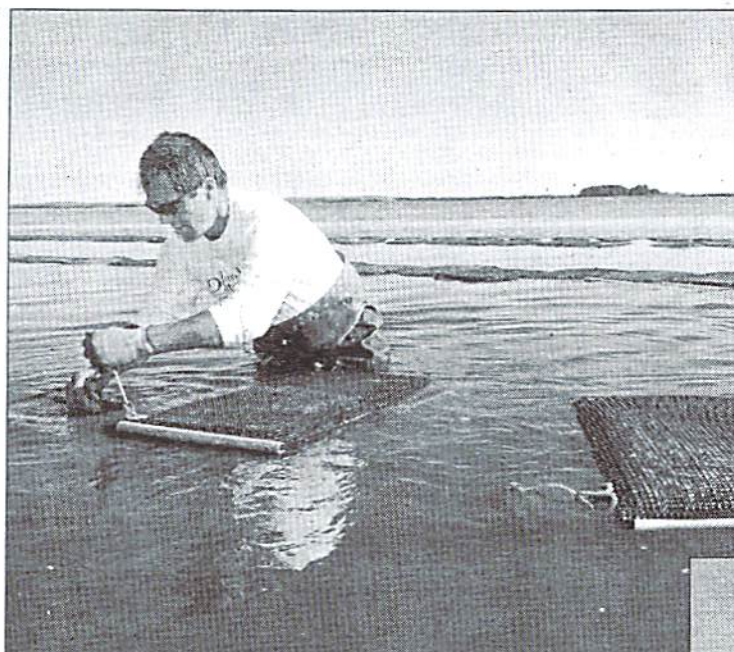


Though they travel far and wide, Island Creek Oysters are also a local favorite. In Kingston, Solstice chef-owner John Cataldi prepares them with a yuzu sorbet, green onions and a Thai chili-and-chive sauce.

Photos by Karen Wong



After the oysters are planted, they grow "free range" for about 12 months. The entire process from seed to harvest takes 18 months. Farmers like Andy Yberg pick the oysters by hand (above, left) and sort them by size, shape and quality (above, right). Because oysters sold in Massachusetts have to be at least three inches long, farmers use sizing rings (right) as a guide.



Once the oysters reach the nursery, staffers like Maggie Ogden (below) scrub and clean the bags almost daily to maintain maximum water flow.

The oysters are transferred from the upwellers to the nursery; Will Heward and Andy Puopolo place some into plastic mesh bags (above, left) that Island Creek founder Skip Bennett (above, right) places on a line to float in the Back River or in metal cages on the flats of Duxbury Bay.



After spending 4 to 6 weeks in the nursery, the oysters are taken out of the bags and planted on the bay floor.

